ABSTRACT
            Instructors of professional courses such as
advertising copywriting need to exercise caution in assigning grades
to their students' creative work. Some alternative assessment methods
can equally emphasize process and product. One successful technique
is "praiseworthy grading," which shifts the focus from fault-finding
to appreciation of positive features. In this approach, the more
praiseworthy the student's work, the higher the grade that is
awarded. The instructor could also develop multiple criteria, for use
with "prescriptions," in which numerical scoring quantifies and
objectifies the evaluation of creative work. A second technique is
peer evaluation in which students criticize the performance of other
students. This format focuses on the learning process and is
tailor-made for creative work. The burden on the student to please
only the instructor is lifted. Perhaps the optimal opportunity to
estimate student progress is the self-assessment method. A
contractual self-assessment involves letting students set their own
goals, with the instructor facilitating both the learning to which
the student aspired and the assessment by students of their learning.
The instructor can also create an individualistic sequential
criterion format, based on course objectives and outcome
expectations. This provides the student with regular feedback on
having acquired specific skills or content. (Students' comments and
three figures providing a sample assessment sheet for each evaluation
method are included.) (KEH)

Alternative Student Assessments
in Advertising Copywriting

Submitted to Special Topics
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by

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ALTERNATIVE STUDENT ASSESSMENTS IN AD COPYWRITING

One of the most challenging and consistently difficult aspects of a professional course like advertising copywriting is the assessment and grading of student's creative work. Given all the differing factors such as your own subjectivity, your students' capabilities, the purpose of the course and the objective of the ad and many hours are spent grading creative work or creatively grading work. There has to be a better way!

What follows is an examination of several methods used by this author to discover alternative assessment methods. The paper discusses the methods used and the student's reactions to them. It is the author's hope that this discussion will open a re-examination of other instructors grading practices and provide the impetus for trying something new next time around!

WHAT STUDENTS SAY ABOUT ASSESSMENT

Students themselves are excellent interpreters of the challenge this paper is discussing. Too often we are inclined to dismiss their opinions. This is a mistake. According to Pace, studies indicate that college students are conscientious and express their opinions forthrightly, if given the opportunity.

Small groups of students in three different ad copywriting courses discussed with me their perceptions of how their learning had been assessed. The two questions that dominated the discussions were:

1. How does the evaluator know what the student is learning?

2. Do grades affect your creativity?

The groups were small and in no way represent an exhaustive study, but still the views point to issues that should be examined.

One weakness in assessment that became apparent through these discussions is failure of the instructor to highlight the learning that has occurred. As a student put it,

"I didn't know anything about creative strategy, then I felt I really had a handle on it, but got a C on my first ad because there was no logo. The prof never even mentioned my strategy."

"I began to examine all ads during any day, TV, radio, magazines, and could really see what was working and why."

Did the professor know you did this?

"It was never discussed."

Here is learning that hasn't been observed, a deeper understanding developed in the course, but not evaluated as part of it.

"I don't think my accomplishments were accurately determined. A multiple choice test about the elements of advertising doesn't really prove anything, except you have a memory."

"There doesn't seem to be much of a match between the purpose of the class and the grades."

If we test for facts, and our goal was a thought process, we're probably missing the learning we had hoped to promote.

"If I try something different, branch out a little, and end up getting a C - forget it. I'll just do what the prof likes."

"No one examines our thinking, how we approached the problem. It's that final ad that counts. In the real world, OK, but I'd like some credit for effort and problem-solving too."

Effective assessment should include factors such as evaluating from observation and examination of critical thinking.

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Many techniques and tests have been developed to assess college students' work. Which to use depends on the institution's goals and the content of each student's educational experience.

The following methods are available for use separately or in combinations. All of them have aspects that particularly recommend them for creative work such as advertising copywriting. During one semester I had three sections of ad copy and experimented with the techniques. Interestingly, I did design a study to determine differences in the evaluative techniques and their bearing on knowledge or skills gained; statisticall, there were no significant differences in the outcomes. However, as teachers of creative work we should be equally concerned with the process and not simply the product, and I believe there are significant improvements that can be make in evaluation of that process, statistics notwithstanding.

In addition to utilizing different evaluative instruments for each section, I also received feedback at entry and prior to leaving the class. This feedback from students will be part of the discussion of each assessment technique.

INSTRUCTOR ASSESSMENT

OK, it's been done, right? Generally a student's entire grade is dependent on the instructor's assessment of his work. But how, exactly, is this done?

A frequent complaint of university students is that a course grade does not correspond with the course requirements (Siders). Grading also has a tendency to create a strain on the learner. How does an instructor couple the grade and the course work while minimizing strain that could inhibit creativity?

One suggestion is "praiseworthy grading." As developed by Dragga, praiseworthy grading shifts the focus from fault-finding error-oriented grading to concentrating only on those characteristics of a student's work that you find praiseworthy! i.e., crisp mock-up, impactful and unique use of adjectives, wonderful key consumer benefit. The more praiseworthy the student's work, the higher the grade that is awarded. As an instructor using praiseworthy grading, you spend the most time grading the best ads and write the most comments for the best writers. Conversely, you spend the least time and fewest comments on the worst writers. Praiseworthy grading thus gives the instructor a satisfaction foreign to problematic grading.

Praiseworthy grading also directs the students to their advertising/communicative successes. Students consider grading as the appreciation of their writing, as opposed to its depreciation.

Praiseworthy grading doesn't mean you abandon the worst writers. The student still needs your help in building on their

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communicative successes.   It simply means you stop calling attention of students to the communicative failures.

Focusing on failure in unlikely to nourish success: i.e., citing the absence of a motivation to buy is never as instructive as pointing out the presence of a motivation to buy and discussing it with the students.

Praise grading does little to _improve_ writing, but it does yield improved _writers_.   Writers who exhibit improved attitudes toward writing, who write willingly, who are unafraid to communicate their ideas through writing (Hoedt).   In focusing on successes and avoiding discussion of failures, praiseworthy grading is fruitful: it cultivates writers motivated to write.

Obviously this method would be beneficial to many communication courses.   The advertising students exposed to it revealed a favorable attitude toward this type of instructor grading.

> "I don't feel stupid when I get one of my papers back.   It builds up my confidence but still lets me know what I need to work on."

> "This method is more fun and encouraging.   I'm not so afraid to try new approaches."

> "I was sick of my ads being splattered with red ink - even if it was a B, there was still plenty of red.   This system makes me feel good about my paper, I want to improve my positive qualities, rather than dread the weak ones."

Another method an instructor might consider in assessing creative work is a general checklist of criteria on which to judge creativity.   Besemer has developed an all-purpose evaluation criteria for rating quality.   In advertising, the quality of the idea, the creativity, are important factors, but there are others. Besemer isolated 14 criterion to measure the quality of an idea (FIGURE I) which were then evaluated as high, medium, or low.   It's not difficult to see that the criterion can be altered and a numerical score derived for each category that would allow its use in assessing students' advertising ideas.   By using multiple criteria the student would receive a fairly complete "prescription" of his work and the numerical scoring could be a slip in quantifying and objectifying the presently subjective business of evaluating creative work.

> "I liked the checklist idea because I knew immediately what was strong and weak in my ad and where it needed fixing."

> "I thought the checklist was too quick and dirty, what does a 3 for use of white space mean?   I'd like more feedback."

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BESEMER'S EVALUATIVE COMMENT
FIGURE I

Novelty

Original	high	medium	low
Transformational	high	medium	low
Germinal	high	medium	low

Resolution

Appropriate	high	medium	low
Adequate	high	medium	low
Logical	high	medium	low
Useful	high	medium	low
Valuable	high	medium	low

Elaboration and Synthesis

Attractive	high	medium	low
Well Crafted	high	medium	low
Complex	high	medium	low
Elegant	high	medium	low
Expressive	high	medium	low
Organic	high	medium	low

Comments:

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As a final word on instructor assessment, let's reiterate the need for students to respect the instructor's talent and experience in the field. If you have never written an ad, can't show them a mock-up you've done, or share stories of your successes and failures in campaigns or presentations, don't expect them to be too motivated to learn from you. Share your experiences, keep getting new experience - in a creative field it is a must.

"It was great to know you weren't <u>telling</u> us what to do, but <u>sharing</u> with us your knowledge and giving us a turn."

"I enjoyed seeing some "flops" from the prof, it made her more approachable and gave me room to flop too!"

<u>PEER EVALUATION</u>

Peer evaluation is the process whereby students critique the performance of other students. A peer evaluation format emphasizes skills, encourages involvement, focuses on learning, establishes a reference, promotes excellence, provides increased feedback, fosters attendance, and teaches responsibility (Weaver), and it's tailor-made for creative work. By using a peer evaluation format, the burden on the student to please only the instructor is lifted. The trick to it lies in carefully constructed evaluation instruments. Although these take time to design and energy to supervise, the learning experience for both writer and evaluator is so gratifying the effort is worthwhile.

Peer evaluations involve risk and require respect and trust for your students. There are positive as well as negative aspects of the format. One section of ad copy was graded by peer evaluation; herewith some observations on this alternative assessment technique.

<u>BENEFITS</u>

In advertising it's important to get feedback. A good copywriter shows his work to friends, family, co-workers, etc., before it even sits on the creative director's desk. How many times does a student's ad only make the trip to your desk and back? How much more insightful for another eye to take a look, another ear to listen. Another slant from someone who has tackled the same problem. Peer evaluation provides this input.

In the peer evaluation group each student's work was passed on to another member of the class, after it had been presented. The instructor passed out the ads and no one knew who their evaluator was, except the instructor. Each evaluator was given an evaluation form. There were different forms for each type of ad (print, radio, TV, etc.) and each was designed to measure criteria stressed by the goals of the instructor (see FIGURE II, for example).

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AD EVALUATION - PRINT
FIGURE II

NAME_____

AD EVALUATED_____

Main idea in the advertisement is explicit.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

Idea has selling merit, it may interest the consumer.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

Headline is attention-getting, tells the story of the ad.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

Body copy reinforces headline idea, doesn't add new points, ect.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

Body copy is neat, correct, precise, crisp - good.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

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Illustration is appropriate to intention of ad.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

All 5 elements of the print ad are included.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

Overall concept is below average, average, or above average.
Explain.

Should be re-done in any way?
Explain.

Instructor: Presentation of concept to client?_____
                                                 (1-10)

Details

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The students took the ads home and filled out the forms. Both the writer of the ad and the instructor received a completed evaluation. This allowed the instructor to take a look at the process from a different angle, now there was a reference for involvement, responsibility, and measuring the growth of the evaluator. It actually increased feedback and promoted a better understanding of all the students in the class.

"When I did the evaluation, I began to notice more things about my work too, it made me more involved with what I was trying to do."

"I think it's very useful because the instructor can't catch everything and you know someone just like you had really pored over this to help you."

What a great thing to have a class full of co-operators rather than competitors. Creativity flourishes in this type of surrounding. The students felt the benefits almost immediately.

"I did a better job because I know my peers were grading me instead of just the instructor."

"I think the students grade harder than the instructor."

One study (Siders) found a more definitive evaluation could be concluded by peer review. Based on the results of three experiments, the study concluded that peer evaluations were more consistent with instructors' ratings and fostered excellence in student work.

As mentioned earlier, feedback seemed to be the biggest benefit.

"I like to know what other people think."

"I would rather hear comments from my peers. Who better to evaluate your communication than the people to whom you're trying to communicate?"

It was noted that attendance in the peer evaluated group was more consistent. Because evaluation is a meaningful part of the course, it encourages students to show up. They're now being counted on by someone other than the instructor!

"It made me feel like I was contributing, like what I had to say really mattered."

Obviously a peer evaluation format takes more than the desire to set it up. The stage is set at the first lecture of the course.

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Students must be told that much of the work will be analyzed by them, focusing on their skills as observers and abilities to determine sound advertising. The students must be taught the importance of the process, how much it counts toward the other students course grade, and given a pep talk on the need to be fair, accurate and discriminatory in their use of the rating form.

DRAWBACKS

One problem with students evaluating other students is that they tend to give high grades. Nobody wants to be the one to appear too tough for fear of retribution. By using anonymous forms, some of this problem was diminished. Additionally, the rating format must be scrutinized by the instructor and since the instructor knows who the evaluator is, he can help the student learn to discriminate. The instructor must, from time to time, remind the class to be fair, accurate, discriminating and continue reporting to the class how evaluations should be made.

Most of the drawbacks concern lack of training and lack of seriousness or desire to be an evaluator.

"I'm not sure what I'm doing, I'm just learning this stuff too, how can I grade someone else's?"

"I'd feel more comfortable having the prof do it, it's not my job!"

Students will complain early on, but with training, practice, and simple criteria on the form, the system will begin to work. It will become an integral, on-going part of the course.

Also, this system doesn't remove the task of grading students from instructors, it divides up the evaluation. Generally the complaints come because it's new and once again are reduced with practice.

"I would rather have not graded others, but I do think it helped my psyche by forcing me to do it."

"What if I get someone who just doesn't care and rates me low on everything?"

Some students don't want to do anything, let alone grade some of the work. Peer evaluation forces the sleepers and daydreamers to do something constructive and meaningful. As far as getting a student who is lazy or someone who doesn't take the task seriously to be an evaluator, when the student knows the instructor is checking their evaluations over, this generally isn't much of a problem.

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Peer evaluation is not an easy task, and it is a unique form
of evaluation that lends itself well to an ad copy class. If you
are willing to take a risk and break with traditional methods, your
efforts will be rewarded. Of the three different approaches I
experimented with for this paper, I found peer evaluation to be
best suited for fostering the creative climate an advertising class
needs. Incidentally, it was an ad from this section that placed
first in the Nissan Advertising Competition. A coincidence
perhaps, but noteworthy I think.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Although listed last, self-assessment represents an optimal
opportunity to estimate progress. Many educators argue that
methods like this are the only ones that can achieve deep
processing in Higher Education (Boyd and Cowan). Recent studies
into student learning (Entwistle and Ramsden) have highlighted the
serious incidence of "surface processing" and the manner in which
self-assessment can discourage this superficial approach to
learning. Any instructor of ad copywriting can confirm that the
best writing comes from the student who realizes the reason for the
advertisement, the student who can grasp the principles involved,
not just throw out a catchy phrase. This depth of understanding
is another component critical to the success of the ad copy class
and self-assessment provides another avenue that can be conducive
to the deep learning required.

Self assessment can be handled in a number of ways. For the
purpose of this study two methods were utilized and will be
discussed in depth.

CONTRACT SELF-ASSESSMENT

A contract self-assessment involves letting the students set
their own goals, week by week, with the instructor facilitating
both the learning to which the student aspired and the assessment
by them of that learning.

In lieu of evaluation sheets such as those used for peer
evaluation, each learner prepared a self-assessment in the form of
a criteria list of desired goals, a description of actual learning
and a reconciliation of these (in relation to agreed benchmarks),
leading to the choice of a grade. Each stage in this process of
assessment would be open to questioning and discussion; but the
ultimate decision would remain completely within the jurisdiction
of the learner. A new contract is designed for each new task
(headline, radio copy, etc.) and an entry and exit interview is
held with each student.

> "I was put off at first, grading my own work, but after awhile
> I took it seriously, I spent a long time on them."

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"The important part of this was the thinking, searching and openness that went with this idea, it was like double learning."

The instructor has to have a strong stomach for this to work. It's tough to sit and watch as your students confront themselves with failure in the initial stages. If you hang on, things begin to change as students get a grip on their purposes and become more knowledgeable with their work. Some of the goals listed in contracts were:

wished to develop better use of adjectives for impact in ads

wished to keep up to date with work assigned to them

wished to understand which consumer benefit was the best one to use

wish to lengthen the time it takes to get an idea, not jump at any first OK one

In my opinion these responses, and they are just a few among many similar ones, demonstrate a deeper approach to learning. My use of contracting pointed to a direct influence on learning style and in a T-Test among the different assessment groups used in this study, there was no significant difference in final grade (they didn't grade themselves higher of lower than instructor or peer, as an average for the group). But the interaction in the class was better, the questions more insightful and the class was more goal oriented, ready and willing to take on additional work declined by the other groups.

If the self-assessment used in this study had been based on aims chosen by the instructor, the learners would still have been trying to please the instructor rather than work for themselves. They would have tried to accept and interpret predetermined aims and standards.

These undesirable consequences were avoided by allowing learners to be responsible for selecting their own aims and criteria. It was a totally new experience for the students and instructor as well. We were confronted by demanding tasks, but in the end the students were able to reach an independent judgment of their learning in an objective manner and the instructor was given the opportunity to learn how the students were learning. The fact that the learner is self-assessed does not mean he should be self-sufficient. The learners needed help learning and the classroom was alive with the discussion of goals, aims, creative strategies, talent, ingenuity that promoted their self-directed learning.

If letting go of the students completely is overwhelming, another format conductive to creative work is the Sequential Criterion-Referenced Educational Evaluation System (SCREE).

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SEQUENTIAL CRITERION-REFERRED EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION
FIGURE III

Name_____   Yes __1__   No __0__

Criterion   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

1. Do you know the difference   __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
    between key selling proposition
    and support?

2. Are you able to organize ideas   __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
    into a selling theme?

3. Do you know how to write a   __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
    first person headline?

4. Do you know the difference   __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
    between demographics and
    psychographics?

5. Are you able to determine a   __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __
    correct creative strategy
    from an incorrect one?

                    TOTAL   __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

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Developed by Hudson, the system is a self-administered, repeated measurement originally developed to help students overcome the anxiety often associated with taking social work research and statistic courses. Anyone who has witnessed the lack lustre presentation of early ad concepts by students soon realizes there's a lot of anxiety and apprehension involved in developing creative work also. The utility of SCREE is its ability to assess individual progress and provide information on the growth of the entire class. It is a relatively simple tool to use.

Each SCREE is individualized for specialized cases and is developed based on the instructor's objectives and outcome expectations. The instrument is administered and scored by the student. The score of "1" indicates mastery of the criterion and "0" indicates the skill has yet to be acquired. To score the instrument the student simply adds the numbers for the criteria. Used this way, SCREE has no value in determining course grades but provides the student with regular feedback on having acquired specific skills or content. If desired, the scoring can be adjusted and used to determine grades.

In essence, students use the repeated measures on a weekly basis to indicate whether they have acquired the criteria in the instrument. An example of a SCREE for ad copy is presented in FIGURE III.

To write a SCREE item, the instructor must have a clear and concise notion of what the student should learn about each writing assignment. SCREE provides students with a continuous measurement and feedback system. As noted earlier, in creative work feedback is mandatory, and self-analysis is a constructive way to motivate learning.

"Although this was time-consuming, I learned a lot about my own work and when I was falling behind."

"I was surprised by strengths in certain areas and knew my weak spots each week and would pay attention to those next assignment."

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Grades are part of a complex process of communication between instructor and student. The challenge in a creative course like Advertising Copywriting is to find a system that integrates the instructor's approach to teaching and learning with the basic criteria and procedures for grading. Three different techniques for grading advertising were discussed and the strengths, weaknesses, and students' opinions of each were delineated. Grading procedures must be tied to the overall logic of the course and the instructional strategies designed to implement it.

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If the instructor wants to promote higher order thinking and creative risk-taking, then assessment must allow and even demand these activities.

We must recognize that grades are judgments by human beings about complex processes. As judgment, they are necessarily subjective. This does not mean they are capricious and arbitrary; it does mean they are in specific contexts shaped by a number of factors, including perceptions of individual students and instructors. The ideas presented here promote the concept that as human judgments, grading on creative work cannot be quantified or expressed with exacting precision of a number taken to a second decimal. Other judgments, differing types of feedback, and new methods of assessing creative work are necessary. This paper has examined only a few. Consider the possibility of grading by portfolio, or dossier, experimenting with mastery learning or multiple marks. We are only limited by our energy and imagination, the same ingredients we charge our students with lacking when they turn in a dull and simple ad.

In view of the number, variety, and reasonableness of these and other alternatives, traditional grading for non-traditional creative courses can no longer be defended. Grades are misleading and incomplete at best, and at worst they inhibit and traumatize the very attributes a good advertising writing teacher strives to bring out in the students.

It should be the goal of any professional course of study to foster creativity and a deeper understanding of the process - not just the product. Perhaps an examination of your assessment methods is in order. More than any other element of schooling, grades interfere with students' efforts to learn. Alternative assessment techniques should be considered if you genuinely want your students to grow.

Let's be as creative in finding ways to evaluate their work as we ask them to be in making ours!

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